

Fire's Role

Fire plays a natural role in the forest.

- ✧ It serves a purpose, restoring and renewing nature with mild-mannered “creeping” fires or dramatic, flaming infernos.
- ✧ Fire helps perpetuate healthy and diverse plant and animal populations.
- ✧ Fire carves out a “patchwork” landscape, diverse in its make-up. Patches of trees remain after low-intensity fires. Pioneer species of brush and grass quickly grow on burned sites.
- ✧ Fire’s powerful force at times defies attempts to predict or control it. And while it works to maintain nature’s balance, it may pose hazards for people and property.
- ✧ Fire may not seem threatening as it meanders a smoldering path. But it can roar to life with a change in the weather – or when it reaches just the right kind of fuel like dead and dying grass, dead branches strewn across the forest floor, trees and shrubs.

Cautionary Note

Tell someone where you’re going before you leave home. Let them know the routes you’ll use and when they can expect you to return home.

After a Fire

Dangers lurk “in the black” after a fire.

On hillsides, logs and rocks once held in place by limbs and cones balance precariously, ready to roll at the least little disturbance.

Burned-out stump holes appear to be solid ground. In reality, they’re 2-3' deep and filled with light ash. Coals can continue to smolder under the ash and can cause severe burns to the unsuspecting passerby who takes a wrong step.

Tree snags with their weakened or burned-out roots can fall with little warning. Burned branches at eye level and stubs from small burned-off trees pose additional hazards.

For information

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FIRE in the mountains



United States
Department
of Agriculture

Forest
Service



Nez Perce and Clearwater
National Forests

When fire's in the mountains: What do you need to watch for? What do you need to do?

How Fire Behaves

Fire tends to burn uphill faster than downhill.

Fire can burn downhill or quickly change direction with a change in the wind.

Fire tends to spread faster in “fine” fuel like grass or brush. Driven by the wind, the front of a fire can move several miles in an hour.

Fire may move fast and burn intensely in “heavy” dead fuel like downed trees, branches and snags – especially with wind. Larger fires can have complex interactions that make it difficult to predict their direction of spread or intensity.

Remember

You may encounter firefighters, helicopters or aircraft “working” fires.

Smoke tends to settle in valley bottoms in the evening and early morning hours.

Taking refuge in water may not help you during intense fires. Fire consumes the oxygen you need for life.

Hazards of Fire

- Falling snags or trees
- Rapidly spreading flames
- Rolling logs or rocks
- Heavy smoke and limited visibility
- Holes in the ground left from burned-out stumps
- Trails blocked by fallen trees or snags
- Intense heat – even from a distance – when heavy fuel accumulations burn

Watch Out!

- if you feel the weather getting hotter and drier.
- if a smoldering fire starts to flame and trees start to “torch out.”
- if the wind increases.
- if the smoke increases.
- if you can't see the base of the fire because it's so active.

If Fire Spreads or Increases

The best option: **Leave the area immediately.**

Be aware of your surroundings and the current fire and weather conditions.

Know the whereabouts of other members of your party. Stay in close communication.

Be prepared: Have a plan of action. Know several routes out of the area.

Be decisive: **Leave while you can, not when you must.**

Identify escape zones in case your main routes are blocked.

♦ Escape zones include areas where all vegetation has burned black – including all the tree and shrub foliage.

♦ Escape zones can be rock slides with no vegetation or other fuel.

♦ Escape zones need to be at least half an acre in size (half the size of a football field).

